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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS MARK MODEST IMPROVEMENT IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Fitts, Ambassador, AMB, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

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1.(SBU) The recent Solomon Islands elections have turned over half of the seats in Parliament to newcomers, in line with past elections. Most of the figures we deal with have been returned. While there will probably be much deal making, the new government could reassemble most of the same factions as the old. At first take, the elections mark a very modest step toward rebuilding national institutions after their collapse five years ago.

2.(C) The Solomon Islands held April 6 seems to have gone true to past form in turning out roughly half of the 50 members of Parliament. The returns for all but two seats now appear final. While Prime Minister Kemakeza, Finance Minister Boyle and Foreign Minister Chan were returned, the new faces include some that are troubling. For example, two new members from Honiara were members of the Malaitan militia which touched off the ethnic disturbances which brought most national institutions to their knees. (One, Charles Dausebea is permanently ineligible for a US visa for his activities. He is barred from Australia as well.)

3.(SBU) The eight political parties often command only tenuous loyalty and 18 of the new parliamentarians are independents, so the horse trading could be complex. However, the groups that formed the core of the previous government now claim 17 (AIM) and 14 (the PM's PAP) seats respectively. While that probably represents some double counting, it adds up to more than half of the seat and they so may well be able to stitch something together in relatively short order. No one thinks any announcements will be made until after the Easter Holidays, however.

4.(SBU) Some 50 international observers, including our consular officer, monitored the election. In their wrap up statement, the observers termed the elections generally free, fair and peaceful. They did find minor technical errors but noted that these were not significant enough to compromise the integrity of the process. However, there has been a flood of anecdotal complaints of irregularities which will have to be examined for merit if/when evidence is produced. These include relatively large-scale (for such a small place) use of bogus, already dead names, etc. in the Honiara districts.

5.(C) Comment: While there has been much infighting, there has been little real politics since the 2003 Australian-led intervention, RAMSI. Politicians have largely sat the period out, waiting to see how the situation developed and waiting for this election. The most important question now for outside

observers will be how the new Parliament works with RAMSI, which put three ministers from the last government in jail on various charges. Certainly the three new MPs in Honiara can't be counted as RAMSI supporters. However, throughout the countryside, RAMSI remains overwhelmingly supported for having stopped the violence and restoring civil order. We believe no conceivable government would buck that tide anytime soon.

6.(C) The Australian government has the largest stake and it's observers view the election as "an incremental improvement with a couple of disappointing surprises." We'll second that opinion, at least until we get a good look at the new government.

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